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'C-Cubed' Problems Face U.S. Battle Preparedness

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff have named a lieutenant general to try to improve control of U.S. weapons, an area that senior military and civilian officials believe would be a major weakness in any confrontation with the Soviet Union.

While Pentagon attention and public discussion focus on weapons systems such as a new MX missile, there has been little attention to problems of commanding, controlling and communicating with U.S. strategic systems.

These are what the military calls "C-cubed" problems. Intelligence is a fourth aspect of the overall subject.

The subject has surfaced periodically in the past quarter-century to cause concern in the defense and intelligence communities, then been ignored and virtually forgotten again. Now officials in the White House as well as the Pentagon consider C-cubed improvements more urgent as a result of the loss of U.S. superiority in strategic weapons.

This sense of urgency has been growing for a year or two. So far it has produced no significant improvements, however. Officials say that organizational problems within the armed forces will limit any effects of putting a general from the Joint Chiefs on the subject.

THE GENERAL is Hillman Dickinson, who has been the commanding general of the Army's Communications Research and Development Command. He is being given a third star to become the Joint Chiefs' director for command, control and communications systems. He is scheduled to take over within the next few weeks.

The most obvious aspect of his new subject is hardware. This would include such tasks as making sure that reconnaissance and early warning satellites can continue to provide intelligence to military analysts in underground bunkers despite enemy attempts to destroy or silence

designated decision-makers and back to the weapons systems.

In addition to the hardware, there is the business of organizing the command structure in a more efficient way. There is a widespread feeling among military and civilian students of the subject that this country is not very well organized for the sudden, extreme strains of a nuclear war.

Some specialists think that in case of nuclear war the Soviets would attack the U.S. command, control and communications system at the same time they attacked Minuteman missile silos and other retaliatory weapons. Other specialists argue that the C-cubed system would be second priority.

In any event, the Carter administration is now concerned about the need to deny the Kremlin a capability of knocking out the American ability to follow a carefully directed, well-organized war policy even in conditions of nuclear exchanges — to blind if not destroy the nation's leadership and reduce a war to spasmodic reactions.

THE ABILITY TO maintain tight control of reactions is part of the job of presenting a credible deterrence capability to the Soviet Union, senior officials feel. But they recognize that this is a highly emotional subject.

It means moving U.S. doctrine beyond thinking about simply launching missiles on warning of attack to a more complex capability of calibrating responses to attacks over a longer period. It means, in short, going from massive retaliation as the limit of public thinking about a nuclear war to the idea of a "war-fighting capability."

The administration is sensitive about that term. It can readily be attacked by critics who contend that the Pentagon wants to plan for the use of its nuclear weapons rather than just hold them as a counterattack threat. Officials deny such an accusation.

They say that, in order to avoid being crippled by a first wave of

needs well-protected commanders from the president down, clear control lines, and communications that are tough and redundant enough to endure attack.

The Soviets know a great deal about the way U.S. military communications work. Openly published material makes it possible to determine the key points — many belonging to AT&T in the civilian communications system — whose destruction would have far-reaching effects. Underground presidential command centers such as Mount Weather in the countryside west of Washington have been publicly identified.

SPECIALISTS ON Soviet military doctrine say the apparent reason the Kremlin has kept some of its huge 25-megaton missile warheads, while improved missile accuracy has made it possible to reduce the nuclear yield needed to destroy such targets as Minuteman missile silos, is to dig out such command centers.

In contrast to Soviet knowledge of U.S. vulnerable points, the Pentagon knows little of the Soviets' C-cubed system. What is known shows that it is hardened to withstand attack. The Kremlin devotes a lot of attention and money to the subject.

The Carter administration's attention began shortly after the president's inauguration with a surprise test of how long it takes to evacuate the president from the White House to a safer place outside the city. The abrupt helicopter evacuation of President Carter was reported at the time, but the thinking behind it has been little recognized.

A number of officials in the West Wing have worried ever since about the president's vulnerability. They recognize, however, that the requirements of openness in running a democracy make it impossible to impose a system tight enough to eliminate all worry.

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